

Child fatalities as a result of abuse or neglect in Florida rural counties

Daniel Pollack

The Florida Department of Children and Families recently launched its *Child Fatality Prevention Website*¹ which provides data on child fatalities alleged to be a result of abuse or neglect.

Focusing on Florida's rural counties during the previous three years (2012-2014), the following observations are noteworthy:

* Statewide there were a total of 1,099 child fatalities. Of those, 43 were in non-metropolitan counties (3.9%).

* Statewide children age three and under represented 81% of fatalities. However, in non-metropolitan counties, children age three and under represented only 74.4% of fatalities; 25.6% were more than three years old.

* Five non-metropolitan counties had no child fatalities alleged to be a result of abuse or neglect (Desoto, Glades, Lafayette, Putnam and Washington).

* Eight non-metropolitan counties had only one child fatality alleged to be a result of abuse or neglect (Calhoun, Franklin, Hardee, Jackson, Liberty, Monroe, Taylor, and Union).

Child fatalities alleged to be a result of abuse or neglect in Florida non-metropolitan counties, 2012-2014

County	Year 2014	Year 2013	Year 2012
1. Bradford	0	0	3 ²
2. Calhoun	1 ³	0	0
3. Columbia	0	4 ⁴	2 ⁵

¹ <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/childfatality/>

² A) 3 1/2 year-old **drown** while visiting grandparents; B) 4 month-old found unresponsive after being placed on the mother's bed for a nap. The child was alone on the bed, but pillows had been placed around her" to keep her from scooting off"; C) 2 year-old left the home and fell into septic tank and **drown**. Family was visiting relatives and did not know the septic tank was open.

³ 3 month-old found unresponsive after sleeping in bed with a relative. The relative likely rolled over onto the child as preliminary findings suggest suggest compressional asphyxia.

⁴ A) 8 month-old found unresponsive in crib containing a pillow and stuffed animal; B) 4 1/2 year-old autistic child found missing from his home at 10 PM. Child found unresponsive in the pond behind the home; C) 11 year-old died of a gunshot wound after **loaded gun accidentally discharged** when he attempted to take the gun away from a two year old; D) 11 month-old sleeping with the parents on the floor on a mattress found unresponsive.

4. Desoto	0	0	0
5. Dixie	1 ⁶	1 ⁷	0
6. Franklin	0	1 ⁸	0
7. Glades	0	0	0
8. Hamilton	0	0	2 ⁹
9. Hardee	0	1 ¹⁰	0
10. Hendry	0	1 ¹¹	1 ¹²
11. Holmes	0	1 ¹³	2 ¹⁴
12. Jackson	0	0	1 ¹⁵
13. Lafayette	0	0	0
14. Levy	1 ¹⁶	0	3 ¹⁷
15. Liberty	0	1 ¹⁸	0
16. Madison	1 ¹⁹	0	1 ²⁰
17. Monroe	1 ²¹	0	0
18. Okeechobee	2 ²²	3 ²³	0

⁵ A) 3 week-old infant found unresponsive in her bassinet; B) 3 month-old was placed on a pillow on his stomach next to the parents bed at his 3-4 AM feeding. At 8 AM the father picked him up and found him unresponsive. The parents were visiting relatives and not in their home at the time of the death.

⁶ 1-year-old child found face-down in a koi pond while he was in the care of his grandparents. The adults were outside talking and lost track of the child.

⁷ 2 year-old found unresponsive in backyard pool with 4 year old sister.

⁸ 4 month-old died while in the bed with the father.

⁹ A) 3 year-old wandered out of the house while in the care of his 17 year-old aunt and drowned in the above ground pool B) 2 year-old got out of the house and drowned while the mother was taking a shower.

¹⁰ 1 year-old sustained lethal injuries while he was in the care of his parents.

¹¹ 6 1/2-month-old found unresponsive after sleeping in bed with her 12 year-old aunt.

¹² 2 year-old died in car accident with mother who was driving drunk. The car flipped over and landed in a canal which resulted in the child drowning.

¹³ 2 month-old died while co sleeping with the parents; the father may have been under the influence of substances at the time.

¹⁴ A) 7 month-old child was found unresponsive after sleeping with the mother. The mother may have been under the influence of substances at the time; B) 1 month-old child died from a staphylococcus infection.

¹⁵ 2 month-old was found unresponsive in his pack and play.

¹⁶ 6 year-old died after he was attacked by his aunt's pit bull dog while he was being baby-sat at her home.

¹⁷ A) 4 1/2 year-old found unresponsive after complaining of a stomach ache and running a low grade fever; B) 17 and 1/2 year-old found deceased in boyfriends bed from a mixed drug intoxication; C) 5 year-old died from drug intoxication after her mother left her at the babysitters. Caregivers were arrested and charged with manslaughter.

¹⁸ 1 year-old child died from drowning in the bathtub.

¹⁹ 2 month-old was pronounced dead two days after he was taken to the hospital for possible medical concerns and sent back home. Although a follow-up appointment had been scheduled with a physician, the child died the day before this could occur.

²⁰ 1 1/2 year-old sustained inflicted fatal injuries from mother's paramour while mother was out of the home.

²¹ 9 month-old child found unresponsive after sleeping on the couch with his mother. The death occurred during the course of an open investigation concerning parental substance abuse issues.

19. Putnam	0	0	0
20. Suwannee	1 ²⁴	2 ²⁵	3 ²⁶
21. Taylor	0	0	1 ²⁷
22. Union	0	1 ²⁸	0
23. Washington	0	0	0
	Total = 8	Total = 16	Total = 19
	Total for years 2012 – 2014 = 43		

Daniel Pollack, MSSA (MSW), JD is a professor at Yeshiva University, School of Social Work in New York City, and a frequent expert witness in child welfare cases. Contact information: dpollack@yu.edu. Phone: 212-960-0836.

²² A) Newborn was discovered choking on her formula after her father fell asleep while feeding her. She was transported to the hospital where she was pronounced dead 3 days later. At the time of the incident, there was an open investigation stemming from the **mother testing positive for marijuana** at the infant's birth; B) 2 year-old was **found in a pond** near the residence after he got out of the home undetected. Although the pond was noted to have a fence surrounding it, it appeared that the child was able to crawl underneath which allowed him access to the water.

²³ A) 4 year-old found hanging from a rope tied to the bottom rail of a loft bed while playing. Child later died and the manner of death was accidental; B) **4 year-old drowned in neighbor's** pool after leaving home undetected by the mother; C) 4 year-old died of unknown causes. Initially, it was believed that the **child drowned in the bathtub** while the father was sitting on the bed texting; however, the cause and manner of death could not be determined.

²⁴ 8 month-old found unresponsive after sleeping with his mother on a mattress on the floor.

²⁵ A) 10 month-old born at 28 weeks gestation with history of respiratory infections found unresponsive in her crib; B) 3 month-old sleeping on a pillow beside her 17 year-old mother found unresponsive.

²⁶ A) 8 year-old with chronic disease died prematurely; B) 3 month-old found unresponsive in his crib with **non lethal blunt force injuries to the head, chest and thorax and fractures to the distal right and left femur. No arrests were made**; C) 1 1/2 year-old left the house undetected and **drown in the backyard** above ground pool. Family was visiting relatives when death occurred.

²⁷ 1 month-old found unresponsive and hour after being put in the bed between his parents.

²⁸ 1 month-old found unresponsive on a pillow on the couch. The father sitting in a recliner next to the couch fell asleep and woke up about an hour later and found the infant unresponsive.